

## Gender and Fieldwork: Barriers to Investigation for a Female Researcher

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### **Abstract**

*This article details the difficulties and barriers to investigation in a particular context. It analyses general issues, research ethics issues and personal safety which the researcher faced during an ethnographic study. It outlines those issues which are common and acceptable in a particular society, but which however create hurdles for a female ethnographer. This article questions the workability and suitability of a supporting letter from a foreign university and the problems of research ethics' application in a different setting. It also identifies some of the many issues in the field for which there are no guidelines for a researcher, so that one has to adapt according to the situation. It is suggested that university research ethics protocols need to be adapted in different research settings and cannot be applied unquestioningly as they are designed in different foreign settings. It is also suggested that more female researchers and ethnographers should share their experiences as one means of contributing to the success of other female researchers.*

**Keywords:** Barriers for female ethnographer, research ethics, personal safety in the field

### **Introduction**

Sharing experiences from the fieldwork has gained considerable attention in the recent years with most discussion about research in difficult situations and the strategies to overcome the difficulties (Bell, 1993; Punch, 1986; Jabeen, 2013; Czarniawska, 2007; Gallaher, 2009). Other scholars such as Belousov et al. (2007), have reflected on research in difficult or dangerous environments, or risk-saturated spaces. In the same vein, contemporary ethnographic work continues to show the value of unpredictable and sometimes surprising fieldwork events (Trigger, Forsey & Meurk, 2012). Despite sharing the many lessons of field experiences, concerns have raised about the relative paucity of material on research challenges and difficulties where the groups under study, the target groups, are disadvantaged and vulnerable, such as children and youth working on the streets (King, 2009; Punch, 1986; Mertus, 2009). Thus, many researchers have found there are few models of fieldwork, and so, are left to use their own judgments and skills to work in the field (see Narag & Maxwell, 2014, p. 312). In the same vein, as King (2009, p. 8) has noted the formal protocols in ethics which a researcher has to follow in the fieldwork may protect those under study but they can also create more problems than help for the fieldwork researcher. For these kinds of reasons, Punch (1986) and Mertus (2009) have suggested that sharing of all the pains and perils of conducting field research can help other scholars which in turn would help researchers to identify similar situations in which people have worked previously. Nevertheless as noted above, there is a dearth of such publications detailing and analyzing constraints and barriers to effective fieldwork, and that was certainly the case for me in conducting fieldwork with migrant children working on the streets in two major cities in Pakistan.

The main objective of this article is to discuss the constraints and barriers to investigation for a female researcher undertaking ethnographic research in Pakistan. The

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fieldwork which is considered physically stressful, time consuming and tiring in itself by the researchers, became difficult due to many hurdles which I will be discussing in this article (see also Coffey, 1999, p. 69). This article seeks to assist female researchers and ethnographers to develop an understanding of the challenges and dilemmas attached to research in a Pakistani context. The research was conducted with the Afghan and Pathan children and youth in Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities' slum areas in Pakistan. The ethnographic research was conducted from October 2011 to April 2012. The overall research was an investigation of the effectiveness of support organizations and processes in assisting the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Effectiveness was investigated by the children, youth and their families using services and programmes, focussed on five support organizations (Government, and Non-Governmental Organizations—GOs and NGOs) working in the slum areas of the studied areas.

### Research Setting

Rawalpindi and Islamabad are called the twin cities as they are very near to each other and there is no separate boundary of each city (Qadeer, 2006, p. 83). You can cross just one road from a specific point and you are already in Islamabad. For example, Faizabad is one point where you will cross one road and you can enter in Islamabad. Similarly, the old part of Rawalpindi – Priwadhai—is just across from Islamabad. The distance which is calculated from F-7 (Islamabad-already a corner of Islamabad) to Saddar (Centre of Rawalpindi) is 12.59 kilo meters (<http://www.distancefromto.net/between/Islamabad/Rawalpindi>) viewed on 8th June 2014). As both cities are located on Potohar Plateau, they have the same weather conditions and multi-cultural population. The difference is to be found in the construction of the cities. Islamabad is newly constructed with modern architecture and well planned, while Rawalpindi is an old city with old architecture. It stretches in many different directions without any old planning documents. Though one city has modern characteristics and other has the old history, these two cities will be merged as one city according to the original planning of Islamabad city so that they become a large metropolitan area as Islamabad/Rawalpindi Metropolitan Area. These two cities are also called sister cities and are highly interdependent, and people commute between them daily for different reasons.

In 2007 Rawalpindi city had a population of almost 4.5 million. This city gained the attention of many people, and its economy was boosted during the construction of Islamabad city (1959-1969). There are many slum areas in Rawalpindi in which there is concentration of the Afghan and Pathan families and where the NGOs and GOs are working. The city of Islamabad developed as modern city, planned as the capital of Pakistan. Islamabad is the hub of politics, administration and government (Qadeer, 2006, p. 83). This city had a population of 1.15 million in 2007. It had the highest literacy rate in the country and also has some of the top universities of Pakistan. Health, education, and social welfare services are readily available to the legal regular citizens of the city. Despite all these positives, the city also lack facilities for those who are living in slum areas and in informal settlements (Qadeer, 2006, p. 87). In these informal settlements, there is a concentration of the Afghan and Pathan families, who are living in hazardous situations, an insecure environment and with no social protection or development provided to them, especially to the children. One of the reasons for the emergence of these informal settlements has been lack of affordable housing in the expensive city of Islamabad. There are eleven of these settlements overseen by the concerned authorities but the number is increasing day by day (NCPCa, n.d.).

Overall, the identified areas of the twin cities for this study are the areas in which children and youth are usually doing casual jobs such as car washing, selling flowers, collecting garbage, working in small hotels as dish washers or waiters (not permanent), in auto-workshops (on permanent and non-permanent basis), begging, collecting bottles (plastic

and glass) for selling purposes, shoe shining, truck art work and doing a range of other casual jobs.

### **Research Methodology**

In the larger research project, I used ethnographic methodology, supported by an analytical framework which acknowledged and respected children's agency (James & Prout, 1997, pp. 8-9). In this study emic perspective – the insider's or native's perspective of reality and etic – external and social scientific perspective of reality - were taken (Fetterman, 2010, pp. 20-22; Wolcott, 2008, pp. 141-145). The children, youth and their families' lives were analysed in relation to their perspectives of the support organizations and their working. The missing links between the target group's expectations and the organisations' roles and impact were identified, and organizational effectiveness was evaluated drawing on the expectations of the target group. Thus, five organizations and the daily lives of children, youth and their families were all studied ethnographically.

Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, content analysis and life stories were all used to generate data. The validity of data was tested through procedure of triangulation (Creswell, 2014). As the studied group of the research project was children and youth working on the streets, participatory exercises were included as part of the semi-structured interviews and life stories in order to create fun and to generate rich data. Drawings, photo elicitation, and writing about the organizations under study and their roles in their lives were other methods which complemented and underpinned information from the interviews, gave more detailed understanding of the children and also proved to build rapport and trust with them (Punch, 2001; Chambers, 1992; Christensen & James, 2000, 2001; Morrow, 2001).

Participant observation was one of the important techniques which was used to get detailed information about aspects of the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan working children and youth. It enabled me to differentiate between behaviours by considering who was present, what was happening, when a particular activity occurred, where this was happening, why this happening was taking place, and how this activity was organized. Participant observations were also valuable as they provided a way to check the accuracy of the information provided earlier during other forms of communication. Regardless of participant involvement, I took as many detailed field notes of observations as possible, and undertook self-reflective memo writing on a daily basis, noting down the important matters, events, and activities in which working children were involved (see also Fetterman, 2010, p. 37; Creswell, 2014, p. 190; Wolcott, 2008, pp. 50-54).

## **Challenges for a Female Researcher**

### **General issues**

Being a Pakistani citizen and a native of Rawalpindi city, and having spent almost my whole life in Pakistan, I was initially very confident about my fieldwork. I thought that I knew the language, I knew the cities, having worked in both cities, I thought I knew of the routes to go to the identified areas of this study, and I knew that I understood the Government organisations and NGO sector. However for my research, I had to travel to those places where I had never been in my whole life. It was a major challenge to learn new routes, new streets, and deal with aggressive taxi drivers and bus conductors in order to locate offices and to meet with my target groups and their families. My confidence in my capacity to undertake the fieldwork was not wrong but there were many things which created hurdles in my way and all of them were external factors beyond my control. Three major areas were those surrounding financial issues, the perceived legitimacy of my overseas university for Pakistani

officials and, thirdly, and perhaps most unexpected, the problems that accrued from major fuel shortages in Pakistan.

First of all I want to talk about the financial situation in which I conducted my fieldwork, an issue which has also been discussed by Bell (1993, p. 32). The fieldwork was decided with the supervisors according to the topic of the study in Australia and it was not part of the scholarship provided by my home university in Pakistan. In addition to this, my home university not only did not encourage conducting my fieldwork in Pakistan, they also cut down my monthly stipend because the management of my home university believed I should not leave the study environment of the university where my scholarship was laid. They also asserted that Pakistan was not as expensive as the country where I was studying. As a result I received only a small amount of money which was insufficient to feed myself and my child, and consequently lived with anxiety and stress, as has also been experienced by Howell (1990, pp. 152-154).

It was fortunate for me that the university in which I was pursuing my PhD, provided some assistance for my fieldwork, but it was an extremely limited budget, providing just enough for my airfare and travelling cost within the cities. The university could not sponsor my food or housing for the seven months of fieldwork. Moreover, despite the assumptions of my home university, it is costly to live in the twin cities as the rent of the houses is high and daily groceries are expensive, as is travelling within the cities. Thus, for me financial issues put great constraints in the fieldwork, as well as the many other challenges I was facing, as explained in the following sections of this paper.

An Australian university provided a formal support letter for the fieldwork, but that letter was a failure in the Pakistani context. On the one hand, the NGOs' staff was not interested in the support letter as I went through the management who had accepted me as a researcher without question. On the other, the government officials saw the support letter as a useless paper. For example, when I tried to visit few Afghan juveniles in Rawalpindi district jail, the director of the jail asked me to prove my identity. I showed him my Pakistani identity card, university student card and university's support letter, but he found all of them unsatisfactory. In response he said, "If Australian University or government said we should hang someone, would we do that? Never! I do not accept this letter. I need a letter from your home university that you are an employee of that university" (recorded interview on 22 January 2012).

To get such a letter of support from my university's bureaucratic structure was a big task, and one which I only achieved much later after I returned to Australia after finishing my fieldwork. It was evident that not only was the support letter from my Australian university of little value, but indeed it appears that support letters from foreign universities and institutions can even have the opposite effect on the local offices and can be threatening to them.

A third broad barrier to investigation was perhaps a curious one, but it had a significant effect on the extent of my fieldwork. Pakistan has been facing an energy crisis for many years, and its impact has been considerable in the daily lives of common people including the researcher. This crisis appears to be becoming even more severe and it seems unlikely to be resolved under the current government, or in the near future. For example, there are continuing power shortages so that the electricity and gas load shedding creates major difficulties in trying to live a good quality of life in Pakistan. The issues that arise from these significant problems are evident in the international and local news reports, as well as in people's protests on a daily basis, the closing down of industries, and the clear evidence that every working institution is suffering from this crisis. What makes lives even worse is that there is no schedule of electricity load shedding and one sometimes has to wait for hours to

go on with normal life. It has affected the whole nation, men, women and children (see Craig, 2014; Zulfqar, 2014).

Moreover, while gas load shedding was also scheduled, this has meant that on three days each week, the gas stations were closed down to fulfil the household consumption requirements. Almost all of the cars including taxis in Pakistan had converted to gas in the last ten years. When there was gas load shedding, the mobility crisis became intense as is evident in the numbers of vehicles that have decreased on the roads. In turn that has increased the pressure on, and competition for transport among travellers who need to use the available public transport vehicles.

Furthermore, it is important to note here that unlike in many countries, there are gender barriers in local transport in the vans and suzukis (see photo 1). Only two seats are allocated for women despite the fact that they are 49% of the total population of Pakistan. In addition to this, the conductor (a man who works with the driver to help to get in and get off the vans/suzukis) is the decision-maker about who is going to sit in the van and such decisions may be whimsical. When I had to go to Islamabad which was far from my residence, I used to take local transport (usually vans) going directly to the places of my work. However, frequently the conductor would not allow me on to the vehicle because it was a long route and they preferred to have passengers taking short routes for which transport companies could make more money. To get a seat, I often had to fight, usually with this monopolist, and at times having to involve traffic police to sort out the issue.

Taxis are an alternative, easy and time saving mode of transportation but they are also much more expensive. I used taxis when I had a short route of less than twenty to thirty minutes to reach the destination. However, for long routes where I had to travel between one to two hours, taxis were very expensive on normal days. In the three days of gas load shedding, they were even more expensive as there was no gas. As a result taxi drivers were using petrol which is very costly in Pakistan. It is not only the matter of expensive petrol but also exploitation of the passengers by taxi drivers, because taxis are unregulated in Pakistan, and everyone asks different prices for the same route. As a result passengers have to negotiate with the drivers for each ride. Sometimes this negotiation takes a lot of time, and often also results in arguments at the end of the negotiation which is a very unpleasant experience. .

All above mentioned problem/hurdles placed major difficulties for my fieldwork even before considering constraints related to children's accessibility, their families' non-cooperation, NGOs' management issues, and the significant limits on government organisations' time and cooperation. The energy crisis undoubtedly put considerable pressure on my limited resources as I went into the field for seven months.

A further barrier was a consequence of cultural norms and values. Pakistan is a unfriendly country in terms of women's mobility, and public harassment is very common. This is the main reason that many men do not wish women in their families to go outside unaccompanied. As soon as a woman has stepped out of the home alone, she should be ready for public harassment which is a very common behaviour, reflecting a widely accepted attitude in Pakistani society. Every male of any age group who belong to any profession, including shopkeepers, sweepers and drivers, contributed to this harassment. It does not mean that women sit at home and do not move out. Quite the contrary, they go to schools, colleges, universities, and to their work. However, women are expected to bear harassment with forbearance which, not surprisingly is a concern for parents and family in sending their girls and women for education or for any job. Unable to find any sustainable solution for this societal problem, many parents decide that their girls/women should stay at home which further institutionalises such behaviours in the name of cultural practices and Islam.

I had grown up in this environment and was used to it, but while doing this research, I experienced more harassment than before which surprised me as I am now a middle aged woman and I had assumed that this age group is not usually the target of harassment as we are considered old. Nevertheless, my assumption was wrong and I faced the same harassment as I had faced in earlier years. Thus I received many comments, many males followed me on the way, or offered unsought lifts, to name a few problems. Such harassing behaviours were unpleasant at the time, and often limited my mobility (see also Howell (1990, pp. 91-94) for physical violence, rape and attempted rape).

Thus, while I travelled a lot, it was not as much as I had originally intended. This was in part because there were other limitations around appropriate times for travelling. Middle class women usually do not go out unaccompanied in the late evening, usually defined as being after about 8:00 p.m., unless they have very important tasks to complete. Thus, it was difficult for me to move out at in the evenings for research purposes. This was disappointing because it limited my observation of the young people in my target group, and their activities when, for example, children were selling tea, boiled eggs and working in restaurants at night time. It was simply not possible for me to go to those areas without the company of a male and I did not dare to go alone.

Constraints on time were not the only limitations on opportunities for observation and discussion. Some places such as internet cafes and CD shops where men and children watch pornographic movies and websites were also largely off-limits (see NCPCb, n.d.). It was not possible for me to go to such places even in the day time, as it is a taboo for a woman to go into these net cafes or CD shops in these areas. Girls and women can go to net cafes and CD shops in better developed areas of these cities but as was noted above, this research was mainly confined to the slum areas, where women are greatly restricted. In part that was because, in these areas there is concentration of the Afghan and Pathan families who are conservative regarding women's mobility and their activities, including schooling, so I often experienced disapproval.

A further limitation which I faced, even though I am a teacher and a middle aged woman, was that being a woman it was not possible to 'hang out' with this group of older children and youth especially with boys. This was because such behaviour – non purposive 'hanging out' – would have created many misunderstandings and misinterpretations among the relevant stakeholders, regardless of the reassurances and the clarifications from the researcher. When trying to reassure families and organisations, I was often asked very personal questions, especially by parents which were not within the parameters of this research (see Belur, 2014, p. 186). However, due to socio-cultural pressure and the need to build a rapport and trust with the studied group, I answered those questions to clarify my situation as a researcher, and to emphasise myself as someone who was not a bad woman or a wanderer who is interested in boys and their activities (see Jabeen, 2013, pp. 226-228, for challenges to women's acceptance as researcher).

The attitude of the government officials was just as I had feared before the start of the fieldwork, and was not very useful for me. Government officials' responses were usually characterised by ignoring me, since not paying attention to an outsider without any appropriate link is commonly found in Pakistan bureaucracies. It was only possible for me to interview a director of one government organisation which was responsible for child protection and their rights, and in this case I was accepted through a reference otherwise it would not have been possible at all (see Jabeen, 2013). Being part of a middle class family meant that I did not know any influential persons such as a director general, section officer or even a clerk in the government organisations and ministries. This meant I also had no valuable links. This lack of family contact with inside contacts or gatekeepers, resulted in frustration and disappointment, and it took considerable time and often wasted effort to make

contacts and to get appropriate referrals from those contacts. Generally common citizens are publicly assured that it is easy to go to public organisations and ministries for information about their work or to complain about it. Thus even though I was educated, confident, knew the system, and was an employee of a government university, I found major barriers to access to persons working at middle or high order ranks without any appropriate links or references.

Another related problem which I faced was that when I finally achieved access to senior or even junior employees in government offices, there was minimal or no time allocation for interviews, and a strong reluctance in sharing the data and published reports. Many times during the seven months fieldwork, government officials would set a time for interviews and then not show up. It was also the case that several times government officials would say they had to go to urgent meetings, thus giving me another time for interview or shortening the interviews without allowing me to ask questions (Czariawska, 2007, pp. 76-83; Jabeen, 2013, p. 225).

Another factor that also contributed to my frustration in fieldwork research was that most government officials always appeared not to be taking the research itself seriously, and indeed some considered it as waste of time. Most of the government officials I interviewed firmly believed that they did not need any more research on children and their issues. All of these officials assumed that the government knew all the answers to the issues facing the Afghan and Pathan children working on the streets. As the focus of research was on child protection, children's rights and institutions working for children's welfare, the avoidance shown clearly by the government officials was disappointing. Content analysis of published reports and actual practices in the field revealed many lacunae on the part of the government, so it is perhaps not surprising that I experienced such defensive behaviour when I asked questions about government responses to the gaps and plight of children and youth working on the streets. The experience of working with government officials in this research showed that the continuing problems of bureaucracy which Pakistan has faced since Independence and will continue to prevail in the coming years as well.

Some of the NGOs at the 'shopfront' level also behaved in a strange way when they did not want to talk, or to share information. They were reluctant to give permission to an independent researcher to work in their organizations. While openness, transparency, and sharing of information are the main principles of most of the NGOs, especially if they are attached with the United Nations agency, the situation at the field level was very different. Just as it had been with some government officials, there was also a need of strong reference from a known person for an appointment with some responsible officers in NGOs.

### **Ethical Requirements**

The idea that research should be guided by ethical principles and consideration began to become formal requirement in the post World War II period (Gallaher, 2009, p. 129). Certainly it is one of the greatest challenges to conduct research such as this with children and youth, because it involves a vulnerable group who are dependent and who could be exploited during the research process. It is even more the case in children from marginal groups within society. Not surprisingly, many ethical issues are involved in such research. Nevertheless, there are many researchers who have analysed the ethical issues germane to researching with or on children in different situations, and have provided guidance to other researchers (see Morrow & Richards, 1990; Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 482; Morrow, 2008, p. 54). However, socio-political situations and treatment of children in different cultures varies greatly, which again emphasises the need to use skills, judgement and understanding of the researcher in different research contexts (Chambers, 1997). As this study was done for a PhD dissertation, the highly specific and prescriptive ethics protocols

from the university were required as well. It was a complicated and lengthy process in itself, and also created new problems for the researcher in the field, for which there appeared to be no guidance available in the literature.

The first problem arising from the formal ethics protocols came in the approved means for making contact with and gaining access to children and youth through the support organizations studied in this research. This restriction prevented direct access to children who were not part of the approved organizations. This meant there was no opportunity for comparisons between different groups, including with those children and youth who work on the streets but do not attend programmes or services of an aid organization. However, snowballing sampling technique enabled me to meet some children and youth who were not part of the organizations but shared the same lives with the studied group and were referred by them.

A second difficulty arose in the rules of access required by university ethics protocols. It is believed in Pakistan that children are dependent, irrational and have no ability to express their views in an independent way, especially children and youth working on the streets. This was evident in the language of consent/support letters received from the support organizations, studied in this research (as per the obligations of the formal ethics requirements). All support organizations used the word 'research on children' rather than 'research with children', revealing many organisations' attitudes to the children's capabilities and skills to participate in research and raising their voices. In addition, the staff of the studied organizations was determined to convince me that these children and youth knew nothing and so, would not be able to participate in the current research. These staff in organizations whose primary goal was to assist the children to develop capacity firmly believed that my research would not tell me or them anything.

In addition to this, such belief was further evident in the staff of the organizations, when I was trying to get *informed consent* from the children (see Graham et al., 2014, pp. 50-51). Informed consent required I get the signature on the consent forms to participate in this research. The forms had been developed specifically for this research and had met the requirements of the ethics clearance required by the university. However, the staff in the NGOs told me explicitly that there was no need to obtain permission from children and youth, as this was not a practice in their organizations for either research conducted by the organization or by any external person and organization. This is despite the fact that, previously, such practices had created problems for children who trusted the staff and other persons who came from other institutions for research. Irresponsible practices included publishing children's stories and their pictures in the newspapers and running T.V programmes without the consent of children and youth (interviews with children during fieldwork from October 2011 to April 2012). Despite previous exploitation of this marginalised group, staff was emphatic about not obtaining the consent of children and youth to participating in this research which not only created an uncomfortable situation for me, but also was a constraint in building a working relationship with the staff.

Rapport building in research with children and youth was also an important and initial part of the research. It is believed by many researchers that rapport building with children and youth takes time as it is a matter of trust and confidence in a stranger, that is, the researcher (see Punch, 2002; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Narag & Maxwell, 2014, p. 314). The point of building rapport in this research was not only based on exemplars from childhood studies' experts, but also was part of the ethics protocol required by my host university. However, the reality in the field proved to be totally different. The staff of the organizations was not able to comprehend the concept of rapport building, nor why I was attending their activities. That was despite the fact that a complete written information sheet introducing this research had been given to the staff when I was gaining their consent to participate in this research in one



to one meetings. Yet they simply did not comprehend why I was not interviewing children and youth or doing participatory exercises on the first day in their offices or Drop-in-Centres (DICs). It was only after four or five visits to organizations' offices or DICs, I began to conduct semi-structured interviews with children and youth and involved them in the participatory exercises but whenever managers saw me, they would say "Oh madam! You are still doing research, why did you not finish your research in one or two meetings. Are you not taking too long?" Such attitudes and behaviour from the management and staff of the studied NGO and GOs was discouraging and certainly limited my time in building rapport with my key respondents. Such attitudes and behaviour also clearly demonstrated how research was conducted in the studied organizations whose primary roles were to protect children and advocate for children's rights. It was confronting for me from children's and youth's perspective when the staff of the organizations so cynically question why I was wasting my time in building rapport with the children, because the staff believed it was quite acceptable for the children to talk without inhibition about their daily lives in the first meeting. Despite the discouragement from the staff, I persisted to work with children after four of five visits (sometimes half day or just two to three hours in a day in a DIC), so that they could become familiar with my presence, despite being ridiculed and criticised by the staff (see also King, 2009, p. 8).

Moreover a further difficulty that arose out of the formal university ethics requirements was the condition that, in order to meet transparency and accountability principles, I was required to share my mobile number or landline number with the children and their families. The basis for this condition was that participants should be able to communicate with me if there was any issue faced by them. For example, if they could not attend an interview, session, or focus group discussion, they could contact me just as I could also communicate with them. In an ideal world, this is good condition but if the cultural contexts are different, it can be a disastrous situation for a female researcher or scholar. I shared my mobile number with some of boys and girls who were keen to talk to me. During the whole time period on the field, I did not receive any calls from the youth who took my number and who were part of the research project. However, I received a lot of calls from many unknown Afghan and Pathan males who wanted to talk to me and make fun of me after they were given my number by those youth with whom I had shared the information. I blocked my phone numbers numerous times and in the end changed my numbers as there was no limit of calls and time. It is thus noteworthy that in a closed society of Pakistan, if you get a woman's number, the only purpose is to tease her or make her a friend. In broad terms then, the ethics protocols, and ethics clearance from the university were of themselves a significant constraint, indeed a potential risk, in my fieldwork.

### **Safety Issues**

Security, risks and hazards for scholars in the field have been raised by Howell (1990), Sriram et al. (2009) and Mertus (2009), but the literature is not large. Sriram et al. (2009) expressed concerns over the shortage of academic analysis and debate about fieldwork, its challenges and difficulties. As noted earlier, I am a resident of Pakistan's twin cities and knew the area, yet I still faced significant security issues. Fieldwork is a tedious job, in which I worked long hours, travelled alone in the twin cities, dealt with harassment, and accepted the negative attitudes of the Afghan and Pathan elders (males) and their families. Thus, being a female academic researcher, I ignored the risk and vulnerability assessments in dangerous and risky areas which were discussed by Mertus et al. (2009) (see also Belousov et al., 2007) and personal security remained relatively unimportant during the seven months of fieldwork. It was also a fact that I was not working in such a dangerous or risky areas like scholars such as Mertus et al. (2009) had worked, but there were undoubtedly

some risks in the studied areas of this research. For example, I always carried my voice recorder and digital camera with me which also created a safety problem for me as they could be easily snatched and purse snatching is a common crime in twin cities. While that did not happen luckily, but it made me more conscious and careful, when moving about the cities especially unfamiliar areas (see also Howell, 1990, p. 90). In the whole process of research, my confidence of being a resident of these two cities was of great assistance to me.

Similarly, it was difficult for me or indeed any female to go to a local police station or court since these two places are taboo as far as research is concerned. Women are not encouraged to go to police stations or courts until and unless they have some case to file, or have one filed against them. Most of the time, women try to avoid these places. It is not only the reluctance of women, but this attitude is prevalent throughout Pakistani society. The males of a household are disapproving of their women ever visiting such places even if they do have issues to be resolved by these institutions. These two institutions - the police stations and courts - are rarely women friendly despite the fact that there are many women lawyers and women police stations. Generally women may be harassed very easily in these two government institutions. Despite all of these concerns, I managed to go to a police station to talk about juvenile cases and to observe cases in courts, research which was fruitful for my study. However, the whole process of getting access and facing the situation was quite difficult. Many people tried to help me because they assumed that I had to file a case or my case is already in court, which was an unneeded and unnecessary help.

As the data was generated through a snowball sampling technique with the help of some purposive sampling, it also happened that I had to visit Afghan migrant camps arranged by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Islamabad. These camps were quite far from the main city of Islamabad and in order to reach there and to get access to the key informants, male staff of an NGO accompanied me in order to introduce me into the Afghan community. This was valuable in two ways: firstly, it ensured I would be safe and secondly it showed the community that I was neither alone, nor a wanderer, nor a bad woman, and so they could trust me. In visiting these communities I gave particular attention to dress code and covered myself with a big shawl and wore full sleeves to give them an impression of a conservative, modest woman, which thus changed my appearance accordingly as a means of gaining their respect and acceptance in their communities (see Weidman, 1986; Coffey, 1999; Narag & Maxwell, 2014, p. 322).

## Conclusion

Overall it is not very conducive for a female in Pakistan to conduct qualitative research independently. Many times I thought about giving up the idea of going to places that were difficult to reach. Nevertheless, the most difficult part of the research was dealing with varying attitudes and the cooperation levels of different people involved in this research, even including a few of the children and their family members. Most of the children welcomed me all the time, but sometimes work pressures, time constraints, or the lack of an adult's permission, among other things, were deterring factors for children and their elders. Nevertheless, I had to gather all my energies to do work to generate the data. I must admit that despite all above mentioned troubles in the field, this data generation process was an enriching experience for me.

In this article, I tried to lay out some of difficulties of conducting fieldwork in the Pakistani context in the hope that these may help some other female researchers and ethnographers working in a Pakistani or similar context. However I firmly believe that there are great variations while working in more closed, conservative and interior cities, suburbs and villages. This article is neither a guideline nor list of doing or not doing. It is my hope that we will have more experience sharing and conversations from female researchers and

ethnographers doing work in Pakistan to give an idea to other female researchers to make their fieldwork a success.

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